

Almar Residence, Once the Home of Governor John Mathews

Once the home of John Mathews, former governor of South Carolina, the large eighteenth-century house at the southeast corner of Rutledge Avenue and Wentworth street possesses a garden which is almost as formal in plan as its drawing room.

The design as a whole is oriented to the main axis of the house, while the individual flower beds, some scooped, some round, and others resembling much modified fleur-de-lis, are placed so as to balance each other. An article on Charleston gardens by Loutrel W. Briggs in House and Garden magazine for May, 1934, suggests that the design may show a French influence.

The flowers include old-fashioned violas, star jessamine, cacti, sky-blue plumbago capensis, stars of Bethlehem, and a beautiful double-pink camellia japonica, as well as yellow and lilac bignonia vines and white clematis. Surprisingly, the beds are edged with tiles instead of the usual bricks. A symmetrical hackberry and a sawleaf palm as high as the house stand in the background. The goldfish pool in one corner is a modern touch. The garden is protected but not hidden from the street by an iron fence.

The house is two stories tall under a lofty peaked roof, and is built of black cypress on a high brick basement. Under the unusually broad front piazza are arches, and at the top of each arch the bricks are laid to resemble a keystone. From Rutledge Avenue, a double flight of wooden steps leads to the piazza. The front door has a large lock of shining brass. To fasten this, one must insert the key upside down and double-lock it backwards.

Flower Pattern on Woodwork

The hall, which runs through the center of the house from the front door to the back door, contains a grandfather clock with a melodious chime. The staircase ascends at the back. Both the cornice and the delicately carved tops and sides of the doorways show a flower pattern.

On either side of the hall are the dining room and the drawing room. The latter has a marble mantelpiece and like the hall possesses a stucco cornice. Outside, on the south, a piazza overlooks the garden. A sitting room at the back is separated from the drawing room by folding doors. These were removed by a former occupant of the house, but the present owners found them lying in the basement and restored them to their original place.

The second story contains bedrooms and the hall room which was once L-shaped. Some time in the past, a part was cut off from it to form another room, but it is still attractive. It is decorated by a graceful cornice and a very tall mahogany mantelpiece in Adam style, on which is shown a warrior in a chariot drawn by lions. Cupid holds the reins, the goddess of victory flies ahead, and four soldiers follow. Once when the house was under repair, a stranger slipped in and took a plaster cast of this design.

This was a favorite pattern to place on mantelpieces. Another example exists locally. It is now in the greenroom of the Dock Street theater, having been removed there from the Radcliffe-King house which no longer stands. In Boston, the same design is found on a mantel in the old Harrison Gray Ollis house, which was purchased by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

Until recent years the attic was reached only through a trapdoor, but a stair has been added and partitions and windows arranged to provide additional rooms. These windows command an excellent view of the Ashley, which, in the old days before the neighborhood was built up, must have been visible from every floor.

Part of Coming Tract

The land where the house stands was once part of a tract which belonged to John Coming, mate of the ship Carolina which brought the first permanent settlers to this colony in 1670. After his death and the death of his widow, Affra, it went to her nephew, John Harleston, from whose family it took the name of Harleston green. On July 30, 1783, Isaac Harleston sold lot thirty-five to Peter Bocquet for 616 pounds sterling. From the deed,

it is not clear whether the house stood there yet or not. But in 1793, it was distinctly mentioned.

In that year, Bocquet, who was a planter, died insolvent, and his widow, Elizabeth, in a petition to the equity court stated that her own "handsome property" had all gone to pay his debts, and that after a life of the "greatest frugality & industry she found herself at her husband's death stripped of every thing with a large family to maintain." The court allowed her to sell some of the property in order to pay the remaining debts. Accordingly, five lots including lot thirty-five, "with the dwelling house and other buildings thereon, lately belonging to Peter Bocquet, Esq., deceased", were advertised for sale by the sheriff in the City Gazette and Daily Advertiser of August 16, 1793.

The purchaser was the Hon. John Mathews, who on July 7, 1796, bought the house and lot for 600 guineas. A Revolutionary patriot; he had been a member of the continental congress, and at the close of the war had served as governor of South Carolina, 1782-1783. In 1784, he was elected chancellor, a position he resigned in 1797. This house was the home of his old age. He died in 1802.

It seems likely that the front gate was then on the Wentworth street side, as both Bocquet and Mathews, were described in the directories as living on that street. The carriage gate still opens on Wentworth street.

Mathews's executors sold the house in 1820 to Lawrence M. Dawson, a planter, from whom it was acquired in 1822 by J. Harleston Reid. Daniel Miler bought it in 1863. Since 1912, it has been the home of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Picaud Almar.

K. R.

Late 18th Century Residence Once Owned By S.C. Governor

EDITOR'S NOTE: Twenty-third in a series of articles on the early dwellings along Beaufain and Wentworth streets. The twenty-fourth will appear on Saturday.)

By W.H.J. THOMAS

The large, three-story residence that occupies the lot at the southeast corner of Wentworth Street and Rutledge Avenue was constructed during the late decades of the 18th century when it faced out to the Ashley River and must have stood quite alone in a rural district.

The property was owned by the Harleston family for two generations before it came into the possession of Isaac Child Harleston (1745-1798), a member of the First Provincial Congress who later served as an officer with the Sixth Regiment of Continentals during the Revolutionary War. It is uncertain whether the house was built by Harleston or by the next owner of the property.

Harleston sold the lot to Peter Bocquet on July 30, 1783. It is not possible to

determine from the deed of conveyance whether a house was standing there at that time. Because the city directory of 1782 (the earliest that has survived) and the fire map of 1788 do not concern themselves with this country district, it is not possible to locate a house or Maj. Harleston's residence for that period.

The city listings of 1790, however, do show Bocquet living at what is now 74 Rutledge (the property was listed as Wentworth Street until 1801). The first actual mention of the present dwelling was in 1793, when Bocquet died insolvent, and his widow in a petition to the equity court stated that her "handsome property" had all gone to pay his debts, and that after a life of the "Greatest frugality and Industry she found herself at her Husband's Death stripped of everything with a large Family to maintain."

The court allowed her to sell some of her late husband's property. On Aug. 16, 1793, the sheriff advertised five lots for sale in the City Gazette and Daily Advertiser. These included the one at Wentworth

and Rutledge "with the dwelling house and other buildings thereon, lately belonging to Peter Bocquet, Esq., deceased".

The property was purchased on July 7, 1796, by John Mathews, a Revolutionary patriot, a member of the Continental Congress and the governor of South Carolina from 1781 to 1783, following in office the state's first governor, John Rutledge. Mathews paid 735 pounds sterling for the property. There has been talk that Mathews was perhaps the builder of 74 Rutledge, and that he constructed it about 1800. This was the date tagged to the house in "This Is Charleston" but it is obviously incorrect. This impression concerning Mathews may have come about because in 1800 he purchased another large vacant lot on Rutledge just to the south of his home and researchers have confused the two pieces of land.

Mathews died in 1802. Some 18 years later — Feb. 5, 1820 — his executors, Robert Hazelhurst and Dr. George Bull, sold the house to Lawrence M. Dawson, a

planter, for \$12,250. On Nov. 9, 1822, Dawson sold the house to John Harleston Read for \$12,905. After Read's death the property passed to his family, and on April 3, 1863, Benjamin Read conveyed it to Daniel Miler for \$20,000.

Miler died during 1869, leaving the house to his wife, Emily, and their four sons. Mrs. Miler later married Henry P. Archer, long-time

Do You Know Your Charleston?

superintendent of Charleston's public schools, and 74 Rutledge was their residence until the early years of the 20th century.

On Feb. 9, 1912, it was purchased by Dr. and Mrs. Arthur Picault Aimar. It has been retained as the residence of the Aimar family for the last 58 years.

An unusual feature of the property is the fine formal garden laid out to the south of the main house. This was possibly the work of Bocquet, a gentleman well-known for his interest in botany. The plan of the beds, oriented to

the main axis of the house, was included in Loutrel W. Briggs' volume "Charleston Gardens." The author points out that a French influence is apparent in the plan. Several of the beds are in the form of modified fleur-de-lis, and the paths are edged with unusual tiles about one foot square. Among the old-fashioned flowers are larkspur, double pink camelia japonicas, periwinkle, violas and the star of Bethlehem; just to one side stands a giant huckleberry tree.

This dwelling, built either by Maj. Harleston or by Bocquet, was constructed of black cypress on a brick basement eleven feet in height, with an unusually deep gallery to the front of the house (stressing the country aspect), a lofty hipped roof and a Georgian cornice in modillions.

It is apparent from the details of the Adam style to be found in the principal rooms of the dwelling that it was extensively renovated about 1800 when that airy, graceful fashion came to the city. With the exception of two marble chimney insets that were added probably in

the 1840s, the details of room cornices, tall mantles, door and window frames and even door hinges are Adam, with delicate floral patterns and swags. In the dining room is a small scale cornice taken from the Doric entablature.

Not of the Adam period,

however, are the generously proportioned rooms and the unusually wide center hall, as well as the paneled dados that retain the robust appearance of an earlier period.

Formerly the southwest room on the second story extended across the width of



DWELLING MAY HAVE BEEN BUILT BEFORE 1783

74 Rutledge has been the Aimar residence for 58 years. (Staff Photo by Murton)